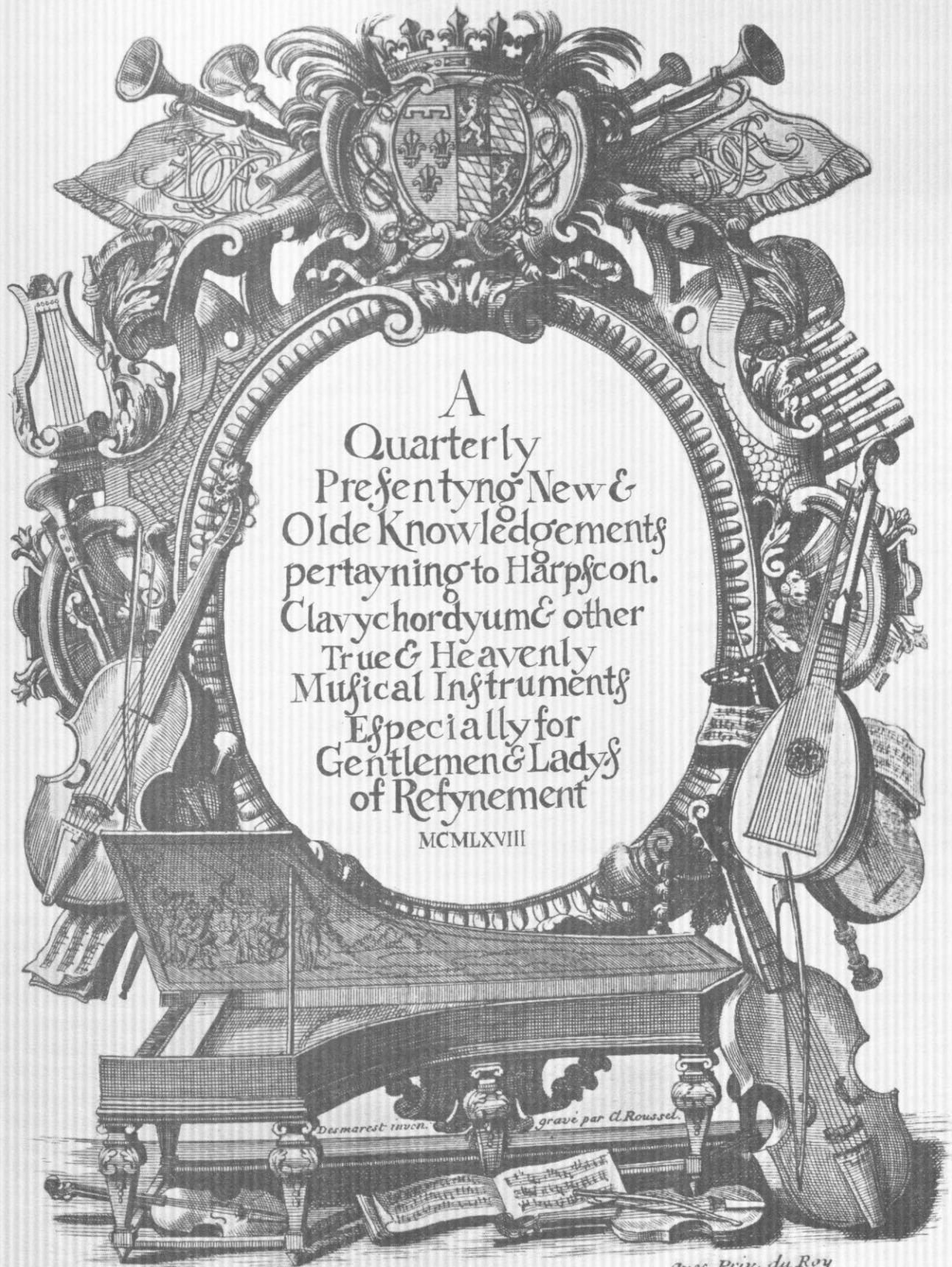


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MCMLXVIII

*Avec Priv. du Roy*

VOLUME ONE, NUMBER FOUR

NOVEMBER DECEMBER JANUARY 1968-69



# HARPSICHORD

Volume I, Number 4, Nov., Dec., Jan.  
1968-1969

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## THE COVER

Art Director Golikoff has adapted an  
excellent old engraving for this issue's  
cover. The original was designed by  
Desmarest and engraved by Roussel in  
1704 for the harpsichordist-organist-  
composer Jean-Francois Dandrieu  
(1682-1738). It was the cover for his  
"Livre de Sonates en Trio" published  
by the composer in Paris in 1705. He  
wrote three books of harpsichord  
pieces (1724-34) as well as a book of  
instructions for harpsichord accompa-  
niment, "Principes de l'accompagne-  
ment du clavecin" which appeared in  
three editions. The Roman numerals  
at the bottom indicate the age of the  
legend appearing in the center of the  
engraving.

# GO FOR BAROQUE

by Hal Haney



It seems im-  
possible, but it's  
membership re-  
newal time. And  
your Society asks  
a favor of you. It  
would be of tre-  
mendous help if  
charter members  
would send in  
their renewals now before the end  
of the year. This would ease our  
work load and assure an uninter-  
rupted subscription to our journal.  
There is a return envelope and re-  
newal card enclosed with this issue.  
Why not fill it out now, while it is on  
your mind, and drop it in the mail to-  
day? Then sit back and enjoy another  
year of interesting articles, interviews,  
photographs, drawings and letters by  
and for baroque music lovers from  
all parts of the world.

This current issue features pos-  
sibly the most fantastic harpsichord  
ever built. You'll find a beautiful pho-  
tograph of it on pages 10 and 11.

Hugh O'Meagher's article on the  
opposite page may be disturbing to

(Continued on page 9)

# SYMPATHETIC VIBRATIONS

## TWO INVENTIONS

by Wallace Zuckermann



Every once in a  
while a customer  
calls me full of  
excitement to say:  
"I've just invented  
a new instrument.  
It's something be-  
tween a harpsi-  
chord and a clavi-  
chord!"

What probably happened was  
that he was building a clavichord and  
not lining up his tangents properly so  
that they were producing a pluck as  
they grazed the strings. "Now if only  
I could work out a way for the tang-  
ents to return without hitting the  
string" he would say. Well, then he  
would have a harpsichord jack!

It isn't easy to invent a new in-  
strument, and the people of the 18th  
Century were extremely inventive and  
interested in mechanical things. It is  
unlikely that anyone today could in-  
vent a new mechanical musical in-  
strument (not involving electronics)  
which hasn't already been thought of  
by someone hundreds of years ago.

Out of the welter of mechanical-  
musical oddities which were produced  
in the 17th and 18th centuries there  
are two inventions for which I have a  
particular regard and which history  
has by-passed to my sorrow. Anyone  
enterprising among the readers may  
want to reconstruct one of them. In  
fact, one of our builders is currently  
at work on such a project.

The first of these is called a  
"Geigenwerk" (violin works), first  
constructed by Hans Hayden the Elder  
of Nuremburg in 1600. This was an  
instrument with a keyboard and a  
mechanism for stopping the strings,  
which were activated by a series of  
rosin wheels, meant to simulate the  
tone of a violin. Even earlier, people

(Continued on page 8)

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## LIBRARY ACQUIRES NEW RAY ELLERMAN COMPOSITION



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The International Society of Harpsichord Builders is proud to give special recognition to the following Contributing Members whose interest and generosity aid materially in the development and preservation of the instruments and music of the baroque period and assists in furthering the various projects and programs of the Society.*

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The Society's Circulating Library has just received a new harpsichord composition by harpsichordist-Composer Ray Ellerman. Entitled "BACH AFTERLUDE" the piece is contemporary in tonality and feeling, yet the basic theme is from Johann Sebastian Bach's Gigue to the Sixth Partita composed in 1720. It is written in the key of C, is fairly easy to play and yet does not pale with repetition. In fact, "Bach Afterlude" develops immediate interest from the fast, gig-like opening and maintains it through the slow, descending final chord.

Ellerman's score is clean, well penned and easy to read (which is often not true of original manuscripts.) Commenting on the piece, the composer said "While this composition was written for the harpsichord, it is impractical for the composer to mark registrations. Dynamic markings have been added for those who wish to play the composition on the piano and they are also to be used as a registration guide. FF should be the harpsichord at full work. PP and P using only an 8' stop or half stops, etc. All other marks are to be gauged accordingly."

Ray Ellerman has been writing for both harpsichord and organ for a number of years. His talented wife Helen Ellerman often appears with him in recital accompanying him on the organ.

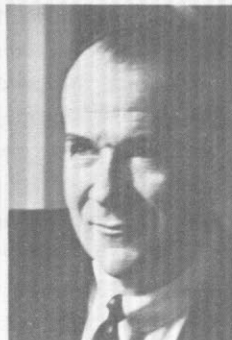
He received both his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the St. Louis Institute of Music. For over a decade he has been active in both teaching piano and appearing as a concert harpsichordist.

Mr. Ellerman moved to Erie, Penna., in 1962 to be associated with the Julian Piano Studios. In addition to his many duties with harpsichord and piano, he plays the viola with the Erie Philharmonic. He also serves on the board of judges for the National Guild of Piano Teachers. He and a colleague appeared as duo-harpsichordists with Erie Philharmonic and also were selected to participate in the Put-In-Bay harpsichord festival (See Vol. 1 No. 2).

## THE PURE EXALTED SPIRITS OF MUSIC Or The Pipe-Line Boys

by Hugh O'Meagher

The "pipe-line" boys, or, if one prefers, "The Pure Exalted Spirits" are just as numerous in music's broad field as they are elsewhere. These are the people



who can always state with asseveration what to anyone else is conjecture. For example, this type speaks so positively that the general public 'knows' they speak from ultimate authority. In a recently published book on great men of music a short preface-section states that the author, (or authors) give titles their original forms except for instances that *force translation into English*. It is then stated that *The Well Tempered Clavichord*, and not *Das Wohltemperiertes Clavier*, will be used in the text! Thus supplying me with a perfect example of a "Pure Exalted Spirit" as the book was printed as recently as 1967! All of us who can read a dictionary can find that the word 'clavier' in German, does NOT translate to 'clavichord' in English. What it *does* tell us, albeit indirectly, is that the writer of the book had decided in advance, that HE is going to call Bach's work by an incorrect title and that his 'pipe-line' is a direct one running right to J. S. Bach, and therefore infallible. Quite interesting, in view of the author's claims, is the fact that Langenscheidt's German-English Dictionary *does not even list* a word spelled as the author does: with a 'c'. The only spelling listed is that beginning with 'k' thusly: K-L-A-V-I-E-R. The only meaning given is a modern one: Piano. Whence this so-called 'authoritative' translation of Bach's title as 'clavichord'? So much for the veracity of *that* pipe-line!

(Continued on page 18)

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# INTERVIEW

with ISOLDE AHLGRIMM

When your interviewer first saw Isolde Ahlgrimm, she was walking, tiny and alone, across a large recital stage toward a contemporary harpsichord. She was dressed in a fashionable floor length black crepe dress which hung in graceful folds. After acknowledging the applause, she adjusted the harpsichord stops, sat quietly for a moment in front of the instrument, then started another of her famous recitals.

Miss Ahlgrimm has for many years been the leading figure in the harpsichord department at the Vienna Academy of Music. Each summer she teaches and concertizes at Salzburg. In 1964 she was invited to the United States where she presented 18 lecture-recitals. She is recognized as one of the greatest interpreters of J. S. Bach and has recorded the entire harpsichord literature of Bach on the Philips label.

This exclusive interview took place in the home of Dr. Angelo Eagon, Professor of Music and Theater Arts of Temple Buell College, Denver.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** Do you know how you first became interested in the harpsichord?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** Yes indeed. I didn't switch from the modern piano directly to the harpsichord, but I made a kind of detour through the old pianoforte. I switched from the modern pianoforte to the pianoforte of the late 18th century and from there I went further backwards until I came to the harpsichord.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** Do you remember the first harpsichord you ever played?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** Yes. This was in England and this is very funny. When I was a student, I think I was about 20 years old, I was sent to England for about three months to learn the language and I studied there in a rather small school but there was

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also a music teacher. And this music teacher had a group playing gamba, harpsichord and such but she didn't play the piano. Of course I had to continue practicing on the piano throughout the summer. Somehow it seems she liked me and she invited me to go to London and stay with her and see her studio and her instruments. I had never seen a harpsichord before. It seems to me she had a Kirckman. She asked me to play it. And you know when you are so young you are not afraid of anything and I sat down and played a Tellemen concerto. She

said, "Is this really the first time you have played the harpsichord?" I answered, "Yes," and she commented, "You are born for this instrument. Come stay with me."

"But I must go back to my parents and I want to play the piano." "That's nonsense!" she said, "You must play the harpsichord. And it won't require any money. You can stay here in my home and play with my group." I was so stupid. I didn't accept her offer and went back to Vienna.

Later, I met other people and occasionally had the opportunity to play

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the harpsichord. Each time I played they would again tell me that I was born for the instrument. And finally I started playing harpsichord more and more.

*THE HARPSICHORD: You are noted for your interpretation of Bach and have recorded all the Bach harpsichord works on the Phillips label.*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: Yes, but those records were made some time ago. I do not know whether I would play all the numbers exactly the same way I did then or not.

*THE HARPSICHORD: Could you tell us how you developed your interpretation of Bach?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: Primarily through reading books. When I started, this was back in 1937, there was very little harpsichord teaching, so I had to do it all by myself. And there were not many books available in those days but I could get, of course, the Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach which I found marvelous in those days. I don't consider it now the most important book however, it is still very valuable. Speaking about books which everyone can get, one of the best is Couperin. Of course, if you have access to fine musical libraries one may copy music found there.

*THE HARPSICHORD: Do you play Clavichord at all?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: Yes, but just for my own practice. It's no instrument for a recital. I like the clavichord very much, but I find it extremely hard to play if you want to play it nicely. So I use it as a practice instrument. Oh, sometimes in the evening if I have one or two close friends visiting and everything is quiet I will play it. Of course, it was a practice instrument in older days. And it might be wise to use it as such today, for if you practice on the harpsichord all the time you might lose a little of the desire for expression which is so possible on the clavichord. When you play on this very expressive instrument you can use expression all the time and find all the possibilities you have to

appeal to the emotions, which is certainly one of the most important things in music.

*THE HARPSICHORD: Do you rehearse a great deal between recitals?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: Oh yes. I don't carry my own harpsichord with me because that would be too expensive and it would not be good for the instrument, but I usually travel with a clavichord. This instrument I have weighs 18 pounds and while it is fine for traveling on the continent, it is too much to take it overseas because of the weight limit of 40 pounds. Now I have just a set of keys, which is



"It is like a child, pointing to a picture." really not much but if there is no other chance to play a real instrument then the keys are better than nothing and they do keep my fingers in good shape.

*THE HARPSICHORD: Eliminating Bach, who would be next in line as your favorite composer?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: I couldn't place them in order because there is so much beautiful music. And of course I like music for early piano as well as harpsichord. I play Schumann, Chopin, and Schubert which have a historic time in common but are very different. However, you can say that they sound well on the same instrument. But I don't think that instrument is the modern piano. I am too familiar with old pianos. People should go back to the old pianos from 1810 or 1820. Of course they are very hard to find today. Sometimes you may lo-

cate some which are very well restored in museums, but usually the museum staff does not want them played and they are very careful about letting people play them at all.

There have been some reconstructions of the old pianos which started around the early thirties, I believe, perhaps late twenties, when they started to reconstruct Mozart pianos. Some of them are quite good but even those are not quite accurate in some details. Others are not good at all. I do not like them. They do not have the correct tone. But of course it is a beginning.

The piano development from 1710 in Italy until around 1870 was so rapid it was like an explosion. It changed so much from generation to generation that they are almost like completely different instruments. They differ in sound, in action, in touch, in quality of tone. And this affects the music which was composed at that time. This is also true of the harpsichord. Various instruments built during different times in history vary as much as the early pianos did. When I play French harpsichord music, it sounds so much better on a French harpsichord.

If you want to play late 18th



"I am too familiar with old pianos."

century music on the harpsichord you absolutely need an instrument of that time. I have tried other instruments and while they sound fine for their own music, you can not play 18th century music on a 17th century instrument or on a modern piano either.

Contemporary harpsichords are

(Continued on next page)





"... I work very hard not to let them down."

(Continued from page 5)

now being built to be general all-around instruments. You can play early music, or late music. It is not the best but then in order to have the best you would have to own all these various instruments which would be impossibly expensive. No musician could get the amount of money from his job which would permit him to purchase all these various instruments. So you must buy one, or perhaps two instruments, and you must make a choice. This is difficult.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** At your last recital, there were so many people to hear you, you had to play the same program twice with only a short intermission between performances. Have you ever done this before?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** I have never done this before. At first I thought I would be so tired that I wouldn't be able to play the second program. But then, I know by experience, that when I have played a concert my only wish is that I could play it all again. I always think I could do it better. This is not true, but I always think that. And this gave me the opportunity to repeat the program immediately and in a certain way I enjoyed it. It was fun.

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**THE HARPSICHORD:** How do you make up your programs? Do you have a pattern you use?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** Unfortunately no. Harpsichordists are always forced to play things they don't want to play. I have always thought that in making up a program I should include the important works of Bach and I have them in my repertoire, but this does not happen. When I play in a museum I am told they have a certain instrument and you *have* to play this certain music, or with another instrument it is other music. And of course they are right. Usually in a museum you play several instruments and you are asked to play various music for the different instruments and that reduces the freedom of selecting the



"... both composers and performers discredit these teachings."

music you want to play. So what do you do? Of course you can refuse to play but you risk the chance of not being asked to play again.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** Do you sometimes find it difficult to play the instruments you are given to play?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** Oh yes. For some of them are not very well restored. It is not only difficult with very old instruments it is sometimes difficult with new instruments because they don't know how to take care of a harpsichord. It's difficult to tell people that their harpsichord is in poor condition and even if they know it, it is often difficult to find someone who can repair it on such short notice. And in some cases they don't have the money even if a repairman were available. So what do you do? Do you risk explaining to your audience? Do you say "I am sorry but I cannot produce fine quality music tonight because the



"Harpsichordists are always forced to play things they don't want to play."

instrument can't produce it?" Of course not. They would just think it was a cheap excuse for playing poorly. So I never say a word but sometimes it is very difficult and your listeners have no idea what you are going through. Once I had to play the Chromatic Fantasy without a D and the piece is written in D Minor. What do you do then? You just must continue. In case you stop, they will think you have lost your memory. So you must get through it somehow. But sometimes I must admit I have wondered how I would ever make it to the end.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** Do audiences ever affect you or your playing?

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ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: No. Unless I am not prepared. As long as I have prepared my recital well, I am not bothered by the audience. Oh, we are all a little nervous at first, but that is to be expected. When I have friends in the audience they expect me to play well and so I work very hard not to let them down.

*THE HARPSICHORD: Do you like to play in ensemble?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: In some ways I like it because it is easier than playing solo. You don't have the whole responsibility. But it is very hard to find good people to play with. And when you do find them, then it is difficult for everyone to find the time to get together. This is a very difficult problem. Now it is getting a little better. But when I started it was a different thing. People who could not succeed on their solo instrument turned to ensemble playing. And this includes the harpsichord as well as other stringed instruments. But now, when an artist is able to play a solo recital, and do it very well, and fill a hall with two or three thousand people, he is not interested in playing with other people. And I can understand why. First, of all, it is a practical question. It's fun to be a big success and receive large sums of money for your solo playing, which one could never get with group playing. Secondly it's easier to get to the emotions of the people with a solo performance backed perhaps with a fine symphony orchestra than it would be with a small ensemble. You need a smaller hall and you will have a smaller audience because there is not as much interest. So I can understand this. If you are born for the big audience and spectacular music, then you chose this direction. There are many musicians who do not seem to know that baroque music also brings emotions into play. There is never a time or period in teaching music where emotions are mentioned so often as they are during the baroque era. While the Romantic Era speaks of emotions, the baroque era had complete systems in teaching the composers to

write music which would bring out the emotions. There was a kind-of school on how to compose for emotions. But in later times, and I might be wrong, it seems that the Romantic musicians, both composers and performers, discredit these teachings.

*THE HARPSICHORD: Since you have recorded all the Bach works already are there any other recordings you would like to make?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: Well, I don't really have the time to do every thing but if I did have the time, I think I would like to record the Bach works again.



*"... he is not interested in playing with other people."*

*THE HARPSICHORD: Do you like making records?*

ISOLDE AHLGRIMM: Well, it is easier to make recordings than it is to play recitals. If you make an error you just play it over and they insert it in the correct place. Somehow, I feel that this is not the right thing. I can play as well in a recording studio as I do in person, but it is quite another thing when they work over the recording so much. If I owned a recording company I would record performances exactly as they were played. Then you would have a record really as the artist played. Because records today are not honest, no artist plays on the stage the same way he does on record. He can't do it.

Now there is a new thing in records which I hate. In fact, it makes me hesitate to make records. When I made the first records of Bach, I

was allowed to play the way I wanted to. And now, whenever you play for recording companies, and I have made records for many various companies, the directors tell you how you should play whether you want to play that way or not. I tell them this is ridiculous. It is my name on the record, not the director's. And sometimes they don't know what they are talking about and they want you to play a number in absolutely the wrong way.

As an example, a while back I played with a chamber orchestra and we played suits by Teichman which had a strong Polish influence. We musicians all agreed that one particular piece must be played slowly. I think we played it nicely and with much expression. But the record company directors said, "No, no! It must be fast." So we all came into the room and said, "Please let us play this piece slowly as it was intended. It is a slow dance, a beautiful dance." There was a young and shy girl in the orchestra who presented Polish dances very often and knew the dance well. She told us that it was a very serious and sad dance and it had to be slow.

So I pushed this girl toward the record director and said, "Listen to what this girl has to say, she knows the number well."

"I don't care how it is supposed to be played," he said, "I want it fast!" It took us three quarters of an hour talking with him before we were allowed to play this piece a little slower. What is the sense in this? Especially when these people do not know music?

One record I made was with a flutist and if we played eight full measures without stopping it was considered exceptional. Usually we would play six measures twenty times and we would listen to these six measures twenty times while little bits and pieces would be picked from it. It was impossible! Do you think this is honest? I hate it. I prefer records with mistakes in them. They can still be beautiful records, and you can hear the artist as he really is. Music is human, and musicians are human.

*(Continued on page 9)*

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## SOCIETY RECEIVES RECOGNITION

Robert Newman Sheets, artist, educator and recognized leader in the field of arts and humanities paid the Society a high compliment recently when he wrote the accompanying letter to the editor of *THE HARPSICHORD*.

Because of the nature of the letter, we have decided to reproduce it in its entirety.

### ZUCKERMANN

(Continued from page 2)

had constructed crude "gamba" works, but Hayden used steel and brass rather than gut strings. Several 18th Century makers (Greiner and Steinert) built copies of such a machine. I have a drawing of a "claviole" or "finger keyed viol" by the 18th Century English inventor Hawkins. His instrument is shaped like an upright piano. It has four rosin wheels, driven by a larger wheel in back. The strings are arranged in four arcs, seemingly poised over the rosin wheel which continuously turns, making contact when the keyboard mechanism pulls or pushes the strings onto the wheel.

Imagine being able to play the Bach unaccompanied fiddle sonatas on one of these! Or even the Mendelssohn concerto! Even a mediocre keyboard player could produce virtuosic effects to astound Jascha

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Heifetz.

But the instrument I like best of all is called the "Tangentenflügel" (tangent piano). This is the perfect fusion of harpsichord, clavichord and piano with none of the disadvantages of each. It was invented by Franz Jacob Späth around 1750. Amusingly Späth is the German word for late, and he may have been too late with this since pianos had already been built by then.

The Tangentenflügel looks like a Mozart piano, but instead of the hammers it has wooden jacks (or tangents) covered with leather on top and held in guides like harpsichord jacks. They are thrown against the strings when keys are struck and fall back by gravity. The sharp impact results in a clean sharp sound, but not as strident and explosive as a harpsichord pluck, nor as muffled and loud as a piano. You can naturally vary the tone by the force of touch and can, in

fact, do almost anything you can do on the piano or harpsichord.

I saw and played one of these made by Spaeth and Schmahl in 1793 which is in the Musik Instrumenten Museum in Berlin. It is in perfect playing condition (all their instruments are, unlike those in certain New York museums) and works like a charm. You can play fast runs and trill or slow expressive passages. Mechanically it is simpler than a piano or harpsichord since very little can go wrong with the action, and I must say it sounds better than either. There were two strings to a note and you could get an una corda effect by shifting the jacks so they would only hit one set of strings.

Although it is probably too late for a renaissance of Tangentenflügel, it would be interesting if the current rash of interest in Baroque instruments would produce a few modern copies.

Wallace Zuckermann



### THE COLORADO COUNCIL ON THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES

600 STATE SERVICES BUILDING  
1525 SHERMAN STREET  
Denver, Colorado 80203  
Telephone 892-2205

August 28, 1968

Mr. Harold L. Haney  
Executive Director  
International Society of  
Harpsichord Builders  
P.O. Box 9287  
Denver, Colorado 80209

Dear Mr. Haney:

It is with sincere interest and pleasure that the Colorado Council for the Arts and Humanities applauds the formation of the International Society of Harpsichord Builders and their subsequent publication, "The Harpsichord".

Colorado is indeed proud that this formation and publication has taken place in our state. Your quest for a more universal participation in the knowledge and activities of the great cultural heritage, both ancient and contemporary, speaks so well for the same desires of the Colorado Council.

Your efforts to keep alive the genius of the baroque era and to interest more of the world's citizens into a universal use of the instrument and its unique music is truly appreciated by people the world over.

We look forward to the increasing growth of your society and we eagerly await the continued publication of "The Harpsichord".

Sincerely,

Robert Newman Sheets  
Executive Director

RNS:cmh

November December January '68-69



## GO FOR BAROQUE

(Continued from page 3)

some members but will bring Ayes from others.

Our interview with Austrian harpsichordist Isolde Ahlgrimm presents all sides of this talented artist. Her experiences with recording companies may surprise the uninitiated. Wallace Zuckermann's column re-introduces two instruments which deserve another look.

S. R. Williams of the Williams Workshop in Los Angeles, writes of clavichords past and present on page 12.

The Well Tuned Harpsichord appears on page 16. In this, the third installment, Dr. Sargent speaks of Pythagorean tuning systems. Our talented London Correspondent, Hugh Boyle, interviews John Morley who builds more clavichords than any other builder in England.

These are a few of the articles researched and written especially for you which appear in this issue.

The next issue will have some surprises plus the most comprehensive article on a harpsichord we have ever published. Bjarne B. Dahl, who has just returned from Sweden, brings us remarkable drawings, photographs and detailed descriptions of an incredible harpsichord built by Johannes Broman in 1756 which measures 12 feet long!

Because of many requests received over the past several months, a fine directory of contemporary harpsichord music will be published which was compiled by Michael Civiolo of Northern State College, South Dakota.

Our interview is with brilliant harpsichordist Fernando Valenti, Westminster recording star who takes the interviewer (and the reader) on a breathtaking trip through New York City to keep an appointment with incomparable guitarist Andres Segovia.

All this, and more, exclusively for you in the next issue of *The Harpsichord*.

Hal Haney

November December January '68-69

## ISOLDE AHLGRIMM

(Continued from page 7)

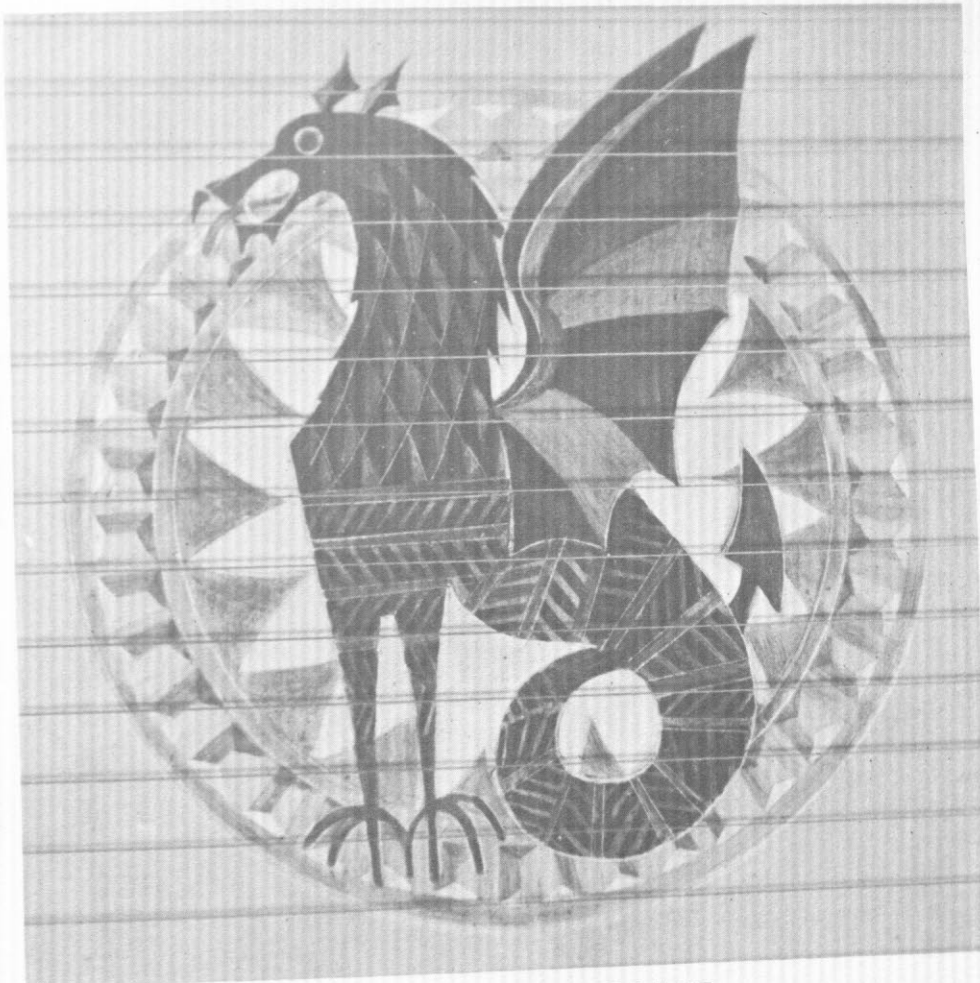
There is no sense in producing musical recordings which are such musical perfection that they can never be duplicated on the concert stage.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** When you made your recordings, did you record them in a regular studio or at home?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** Well, the Bach recording took five years to record. From 1951 to 1955. The first of these was done in my home and the

later recordings were done in a palace in Vienna, which I think is important because the acoustics of the room where you play is part of the music. As I say, my home is the last part of my skin, and the room in which you play is the last part of the instrument. The harpsichord is in a box and the room in which you play is also a box and in a sense, the room is part of the instrument. And it should be considered as such. Today many peo-

(Continued on page 12)



## A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME . . .

by Laurence E. Tilley

Every harpsichord builder must sooner or later make this important decision: Rose or No Rose. The chaps who peddle harpsichord kits are a trifle ambivalent on the subject, but do propose one method: cut a round hole in the sounding board and paste a plastic posy on the under side. Beyond that, the kit kids apparently have few suggestions.

There is one highly satisfactory way to put a rose in the instrument.

That is to have an artist paint a water color design directly on the sounding board. Happily, I knew a talented artist when I was whomping up my harpsichord. Sunny Warner of Providence, R. I. took a mythical creature called a Wyvern from the Tilley coat of arms and painted this striking design in harmonizing wood colors. She did it so deftly that it looks inlaid. It does wonders for the appearance of my Tillius Zuckermann.

*The Harpsichord* — 9

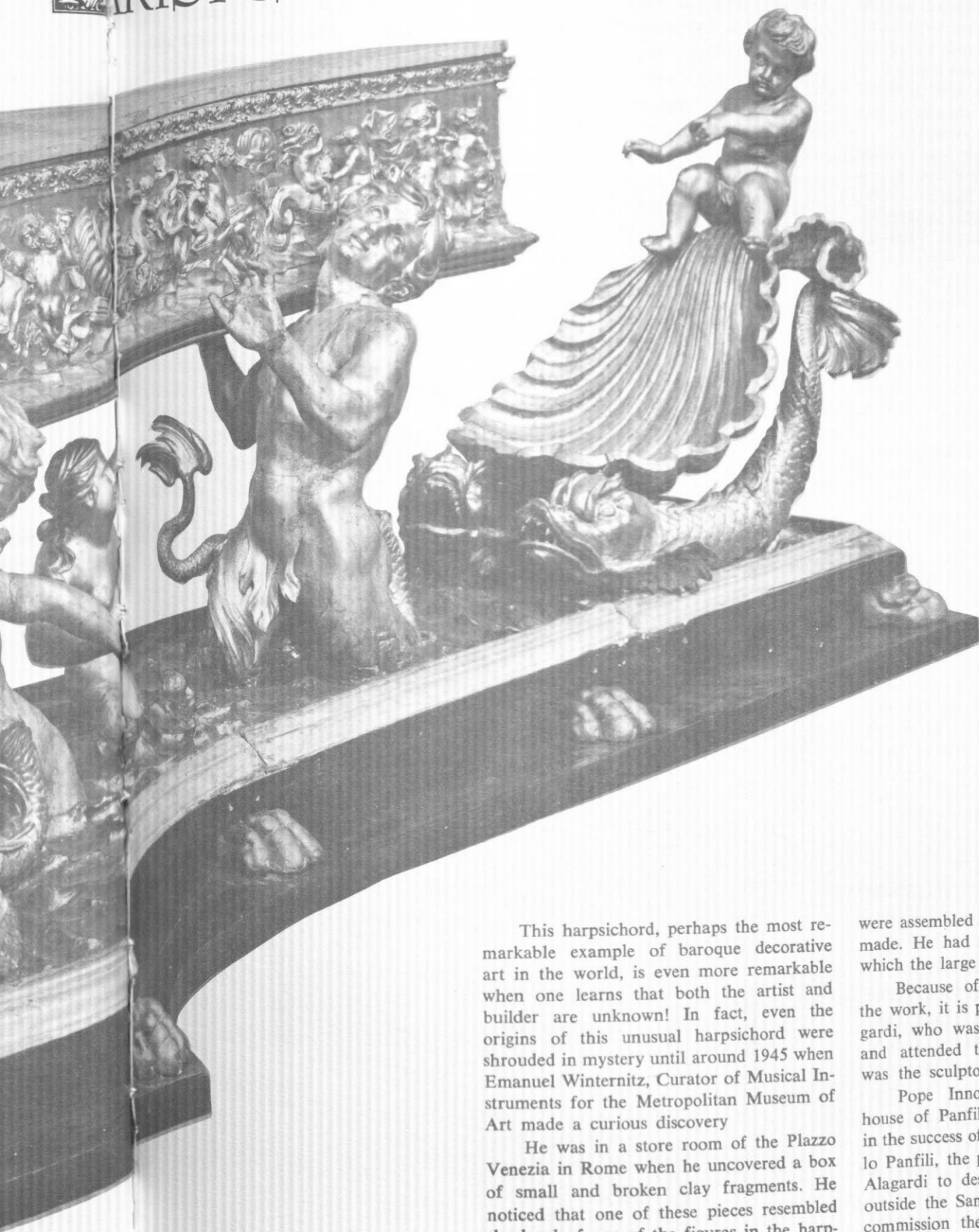




Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Crosby Brown Collection, 1889



# HARPSICHORD of NOTE



This harpsichord, perhaps the most remarkable example of baroque decorative art in the world, is even more remarkable when one learns that both the artist and builder are unknown! In fact, even the origins of this unusual harpsichord were shrouded in mystery until around 1945 when Emanuel Winternitz, Curator of Musical Instruments for the Metropolitan Museum of Art made a curious discovery

He was in a store room of the Palazzo Venezia in Rome when he uncovered a box of small and broken clay fragments. He noticed that one of these pieces resembled the head of one of the figures in the harpsichord group of the instrument back at the Metropolitan Museum. When all the pieces

were assembled a remarkable discovery was made. He had found a small model from which the large instrument was built!

Because of the style and location of the work, it is possible that Alessandro Algardi, who was born in 1602 in Bologna and attended the school of the Caracci, was the sculptor.

Pope Innocent X of the Bolognese house of Panfili played an important role in the success of Algardi, since it was Camillo Panfili, the pontiff's nephew, who asked Algardi to design the Villa Doria Panfili outside the San Pancrazio gate. From this commission the artist became well known and was commissioned to do many foun-

*(Continued next page)*



## HARPSICHORD OF NOTE

(Continued from preceding page)

tains, tombs and portrait statues. The fountain of Neptune in the Palace of Aranjuez was created by Algardi. It then seems quite possible that the case for this harpsichord, which resembles his work, was indeed executed by him. Especially when one considers the fact that Algardi was a noted sculptor at the time the instrument was built and that he lived in the same city.

Another stroke of luck led to the discovery that this harpsichord was, at one time, part of the famous Michele Todini Galleria Armonica. A detailed description was found in Todini's catalogue. Since his Galleria was founded before 1676, this is a second indication that the instrument was constructed during Algardi's lifetime.

This instrument has a wing-shaped body which is supported by three fishtailed tritons. These are surrounded by voluptuous sea nymphs and a putto balanced on a sea shell, driving two dolphins . . . a veritable oceanic phantasmagoria!

One side is covered with an elaborate gilded frieze representing the triumph of Galatea. There are two additional life-sized figures, not shown in the photograph, which sit on rocks at both sides of the harpsichord. They are covered with gold and represent Polyphemus playing a bagpipe and the other is probably Galatea, who once might have carried a lute.

It is interesting to note that the women are smaller than would be normal considering the size of the tritons. This was often done by early artists to indicate the hierarchical position of the gods. This is well illustrated in the work of Jaques Louis David in his painting of Zeus.

HLH

## ISOLDE AHLGRIMM

(Continued from page 9)

ple seem to think a room should be dry with no reflection of sound. They try to make studios as dead as possible, but this is not correct. These instruments were not played in dry surroundings. And when you place them in such places, it's like changing part of the instrument. At times, acoustics will require you to change the interpretation of a number. But all these questions are hard to resolve when we are living in another era, another life. Even musicians who are very strict who said a few years ago "We will never compromise" and they honestly meant it, had to compromise because of our modern world.

(Continued on page 19)

12 — *The Harpsichord*

## THE CLAVICHORD

by S. R. Williams

While it is evident that the harpsichord is coming back in popularity, it is interesting to note that the clavichord has never really been away.

During the long harpsichord-building hiatus, which began around 1804 and didn't end until Arnold Dolmetsch commenced building in the early 1900's, there never was a time one couldn't buy a new clavichord, either in certain north German towns or different places in Scandinavia where the piano didn't quite supplant it in the hearts of many players.

During most of the 19th Century, larger and larger clavichords were built with wider compasses to accommodate the, then current, literature. But even by the end of the 18th Century, instruments by Rackwitz, Lindhold and others spanned six octaves and approached seven feet in

length with three choirs of strings for the lowest twenty notes, one set at 4' pitch, the pair at 8'. While still not suitable for concerts, these large clavichords were clearly audible across a far-sized room and provided the parlor entertainment we associate with the upright piano of our time.

Most clavichords built today are of more modest size because the people who buy them are mainly interested in Elizabethan and baroque music, which will fit in four octaves. (Our small kit clavichord spans CC-c3 and is under four feet long.)

The mechanism of the basic clavichord is the simplest possible. At the distal end of each key lever is set an upright brass blade called a tangent. When a key is depressed, the tangent bisects the string above it which



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stretches across the soundboard, resting on the bridge. The portion of the string on the other side of the tangent is damped by a strip of felt and does not sound, (except on "d'amour" clavichords — an exotic breed), but the right-hand section of string is set into motion and its sound is amplified by the soundboard. When the key is released, the strip of felt immediately damps out the motion of the entire string and the sound stops.

Clavichords are unique among keyboard instruments in several ways. They are the only one, for instance, on which a true tremolo can be played. This is done by vibrating keys up and down adjunct to expressive playing. It is called *bebung* in German. They are the only western instrument with a single bridge, the other bridge being formed by the tangent at the moment of impact when it strikes the string.

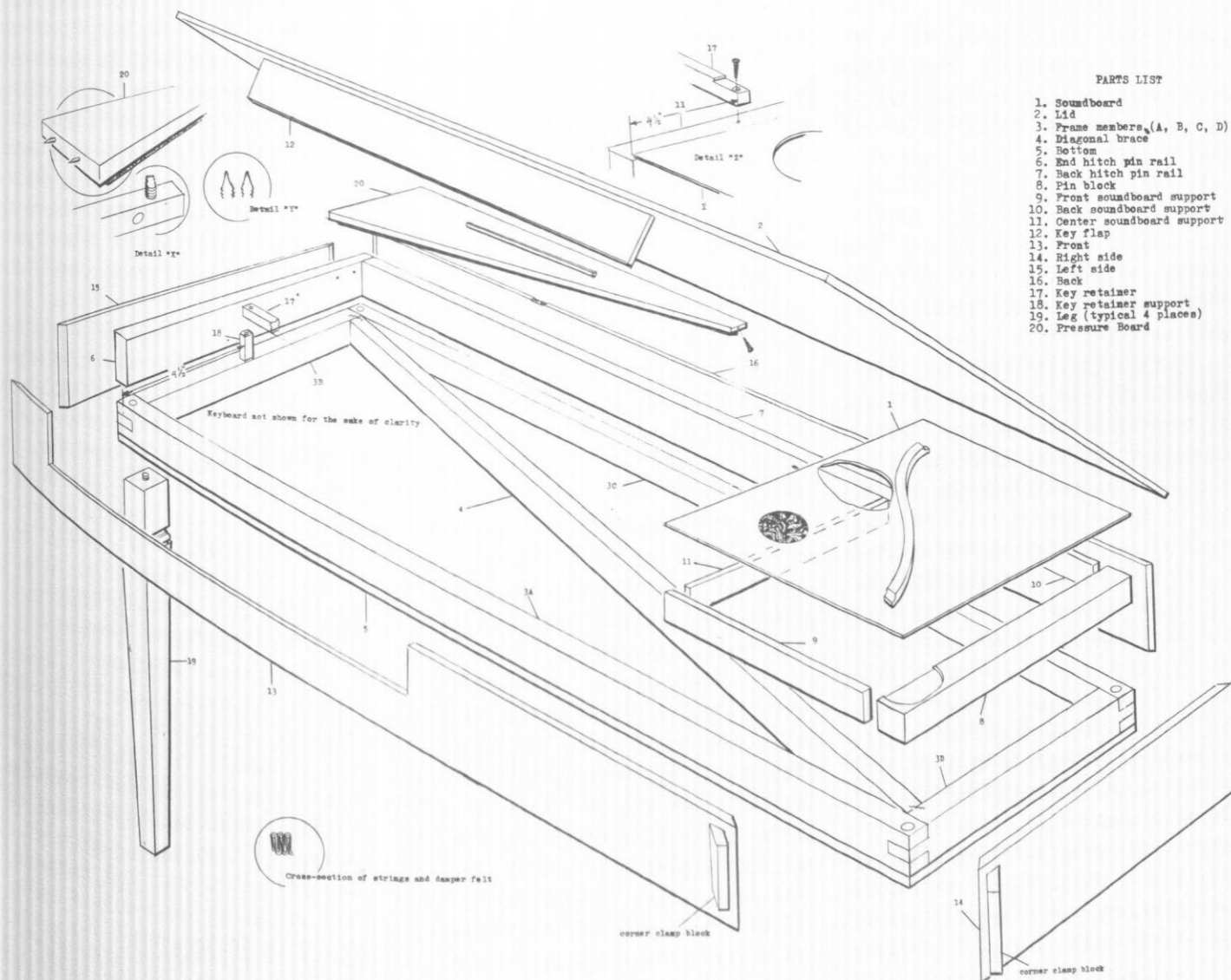
The point at which the tangent strikes determines the pitch and so must be at a precise distance from the bridge. This principle was employed by early builders to limit the number of strings which were both fragile and expensive. Two or three adjacent keys were arranged to attack the same string. Such instruments are called "fretted". Since there were no chords requiring seconds in the music of the time, the limitation on the player was not as great as might be imagined. Furthermore, anyone who has played a fretted clavichord soon learned that it was perfectly possible to execute trills, turns and other ornaments so long as the fingering was neatly done so that the damping felt had time (almost instantaneously), to stop the sound before the next note was heard. Actually, the principle of using fewer strings is a very sound one since it limits the amount of tension the frame

must bear — always a major problem for clavichord builders. Modern clavichords are all unfretted, each key having a string, or pair of strings in the case of duple-string instruments.

The difference between a single and duple-strung clavichord in terms of volume is only about one decibel. Some people claim single-strung instruments are actually louder, but calibrated microphone tests and common sense do not bear them out. Duple-strung clavichords are not much louder than single, but the pair of strings with their double partials seem more pleasing to the ears of most people. This must be paid for in increased string tension, increased structure and bulk, tuning time and occasional string failure.

A word about clavichord construction might be of interest: we get

(Continued on next page)



## THE CLAVICHORD

the best sound from highly stressed soundboards with rather thin strings. Soundboards must not be too large in area or the sound gets lost in the mass. Strings must be within 10% of breaking when pulled up to pitch. On the other hand, it seems impossible to get good, resounding bass with anything other than wrapped strings, except on huge instruments. We have found that laminated soundboards are louder than the traditional plain quartered spruce ones and that tapering them around the sides is as important as the placement of the soundbars. Placing a plywood bottom under the frame to resist the tendency to develop a characteristic diagonal warp helps some, but not as much as one would suppose while it decidedly changes the sound quality although whether for better or worse seems to be a matter of opinion.

Early clavichords were usually quite small with fewer than four octaves, lightly constructed, fretted, legless (played on a table), showing signs of a rough-and-ready sort-of workmanship and were probably quite inexpensive although most surviving examples are more elegant; frequently with painted lids and writhing, carved keys on which the maker took pride in his woodworking ability.

Simple though it is, the clavichord is also the most responsive and controllable of the keyboard instruments and the one which poses the greatest personal challenge to the player. Bach said of it, "Thee and me." All the Bach children learned on it with Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach going on to become the foremost virtuoso in Europe. It was Bach's own favorite and he liked visiting players to demonstrate their ability on his clavichord rather than one of his harpsichords which he thought lent themselves too easily to careless virtuosity. We must agree since the harpsichordist is only required to strike the right key at the right time with sufficient force so that the jack passes the string. The pianist is under a further charge; he must strike the right

key at the right time with a *measured amount* of force. The clavichord player faces the same problems as the pianist but his fingering must be perfect and his control of the measured force with which he *presses* a key must be much greater than that of the pianist since he is working in a much more restricted dynamic range.

The clavichord player works with his fingers quite close to the keys and must avoid striking them or the tangents will bounce on their strings, making a slightly nasty "twang" such as one gets from a guitar string which is not held tightly to its fret. He must plan his crescendos and decrescendos carefully so as not to run out of the instrument's rather narrow dynamic range and his fingering must be correct to avoid the sound mentioned above.

A pianist can get away with sliding a finger off a sharp onto a neighboring natural because there are so many bits of wood and wire between his finger and the string in modern pianos that there is a large moment of inertia to be overcome and the time delay obscures the effect of the careless fingering, but not so with the clavichord player — he must do it right. That fact, combined with its quietness make the clavichord the ideal training instrument because of the resulting carry-over of good habits.

None of the above should be taken to mean that the instrument is difficult to play: it is a delight to play because of the subtlety of nuance of which it is capable, the lightness of its touch and the self-satisfaction one gets from playing a piece well on it.

The harpsichordist has lost control of his instrument the moment the jack passes the string. There is not another thing he can do to alter the sound his finger has created except to sustain it for as long as the string will vibrate by not releasing the jack to damp. The pianist (I will not even speak of the poor organist) also cannot change the sound once the hammer has struck, but the clavichord player always has control as long as his finger is on the key. He can continue to massage sound out of a string

after it has been initially struck by vibrating the key up and down just as a guitarist can with his left hand on a plucked string. Burney, describing a visit to Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach said of his clavichord playing; "In the pathetic and slow movements, whenever he had a long note to express, he absolutely contrived to produce from his instrument a cry of sorrow and complaint such as can only be effected upon the clavichord, and perhaps by himself."

The origin of the clavichord is lost in the mists of time. The oldest dated harpsichord (1521) is older than the oldest dated clavichord, but it is logical to suppose the simpler instrument to be the older. Clavichords are really a set of keyed monochords and the monochord is probably a simple development from a primitive hunter's plucked bow string. The harpsichord with its complicated jack system surely must be of more recent invention.

Some variants of the normal clavichord are interesting. In the Verona collection there exists a "Grand" clavichord shaped like a harpsichord. Tangents rose through a slot, like the jack rail gap in a harpsichord, to attack the strings above. It was probably the most direct ancestor of the piano.

There are sets of clavichords which were used for practice by organists in the days when cathedrals were unheated and a couple of boys were needed to man the pumps. These instruments usually have two ordinary clavichords stacked one on top of the other on a frame over a 20-note pedal clavichord which might have as many as three sets of strings tuned to 4', 8' and 16' pitches.

Gottfried Silbermann invented the "Clavichord D'Amour", so-called because it sounded well with the viol d'amour. No original "D'Amours" now exist, but they are described as having their tangents striking the strings in their exact middles with a soundboard at each end. Presumably, the strings lay on a strip of damping felt near the tangents in rest position.

(Continued on next page)



## THE CLAVICHORD

(Continued from preceding page)  
It would be of considerable interest to us if some artful reader decided to build such an instrument. The "D'-Amour" principle has been used in the treble of one clavichord built by Robert Johnson with small bits of rod under the left-hand string ends for tuning those halves.

Because its voice is small, many people tend to think of the clavichord as a kind of delicate toy. It isn't. It is a vigorous, lusty instrument capable of playing anything in the literature including the most majestic of Bach's preludes and fugues. It just speaks quietly. People who delight in superlatives sometimes attempt to electrically amplify them. It is believed they are the same people who paint turtles.

Aside from the aesthetics involved, nobody that we know of has succeeded in amplifying a clavichord without either distorting the sound or also amplifying key and fingernail noises to the detriment of the music.

By judicious placement of the soundbars (with cut-outs in them where they cross the bridge, otherwise they become, in John Barnes' phrase, "stifle bars"), and a careful tapering of a crowned, laminated soundboard, we are able to build clavichords that have a loud enough voice to satisfy most people and we shall continue to resist the idea of "modernizing" the instrument. We enjoy them as they are.

S. R. Williams

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## Harpsichord Maker

November December January '68-69

## From LONDON



by Hugh Boyle

Having been told by your editor that THE HARPSICHORD was very short of material on clavichords I felt it my duty to do something about it,

and, after giving the matter some thought, decided to pay a visit to a man whose company makes more clavichords than any other individual concern — at least here in England. This man's name is John Morley, and his factory is situated at Bromley — some four or five miles south-west of my home in Green Lane at New Eltham.

John Morley, whose family has been engaged in musical instrument making for the last six generations, was born and bred in Lewisham — a borough of Greater London having a thriving musical community — the place where the company's factory was originally located and where their offices still remain. Since the keen interest he shows in keyboard instruments has always been with him, it was natural that he should have chosen to specialize in it. And accordingly, after having completed his general education at Altham College, he took up the subject of musical instrument technology and studied it for some years, both here in London, and at Ludwigsburg, in Germany.

His second cousin, John Sebastian Morley, has had an establishment in the Old Brompton Road at South Kensington for sixty years, or more, where, besides making and repairing harps and lutes, he has also built and restored a fair number of clavichords and spinets — the latter including many examples of the finest English, Flemish and Italian keyboard instruments of the 17th and 18th centuries. The unique opportunities with which this work provided him — i.e., to play, critically examine and evaluate, for himself, these splendid instruments, put

John Sebastian in a very strong position when it came to giving advice as to their relative merits, in performance, and to pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods of construction which these employed. This being so, it was not surprising that, in 1955, when John Morley wanted to make a clavichord, he went straight to John Sebastian Morley, and, having discussed the project, that they decided to make it a combined operation.

They used as the basis of their design a South German instrument which John Sebastian considered to be of particularly good quality. John Morley then produced the basic framework drawings, and subsequently, the sound-board and casework were fitted to the instrument at the Bromley factory. After this it was polished and taken to Old Brompton Road where together they fitted the keyboard, strings and tangents, thus completing the first of the John Morley clavichords.

Since that time his firm has made upwards of 800 clavichords and delivered these to more than 23 different countries. These instruments have been of 3, 4 and 5 octave compass — the last-mentioned model, of somewhat larger construction than the others, being often supplied as a practice instrument for organists with double manual and pedal clavichord. The present rate of production is about 170 per year, and of these, the greater part are sold in England — but of those sold abroad, the majority go to the U. S. I understand that there is no trouble whatever in arranging transportation, either to the U. S. or to anywhere else overseas. The Morley Company employs a special firm of packers and shippers to whom they hand over the instruments, and who then undertake to carry out all the arrangements necessary to ensure their safe delivery to the customer's home.

And now, for those who are particularly interested in the construction of clavichords, here is some important information concerning the design of Morley clavichords — with

(Continued on page 17)

The Harpsichord — 15

# The WELL-TUNED HARPSICORD

by Dr George Sargent

## Part III

In the late sixth century B. C., the Greek philosopher Pythagoras explained Beauty as a function of mathematics, and in the fourth century B. C., Plato expanded this idea, arguing that the only way we can understand Perfect Beauty is to relate the parts of a work of art to a knowable perfection: again, mathematics. The guiding notion here was one of simple ratios: e.g., there should be a simple mathematical relation between the length and width of a temple, a simple geometrical relation between the height and armspread of a statue, and (most important to us) a simple vibration frequency ratio between the two pitches of a consonant interval.

This Pythagorean-Platonic theory worked well for Greek music, which was very different from ours, but unfortunately, numerous neo-Platonic philosophers from a thousand years (and more) later tried to apply Platonic theories to *our* kind of music. This was a disaster.

The whole problem stems from the neo-Platonists trying to express all intervals as a series of perfect fifths, minus octaves, instead of as pure intervals that can be tuned to an absence of beats. Thus, the minor second would be expressed as seven ascending fifths minus four octaves, the major second as two fifths minus one octave, the minor third as nine fifths minus five octaves, the major third as four fifths minus two octaves, etc. Only three intervals derived in this way are pure.

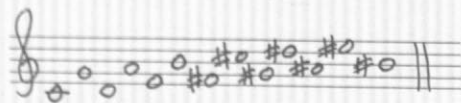
Pythagoras and Plato never intended their theory to be carried to such lengths.

The inconsistencies that resulted from this misapplication of Greek music theory to our Western music gave grist for the mill of music theorists well into the Renaissance. From them we inherited such terms as *Pythagorean Comma* (the difference between B sharp at the end of a circle of fifths starting on C, and the



original C) and *Pythagorean Third* (the major third derived by four fifths, which is about a fifth of a semitone wider than the pure third).

The result of all this neo-Platonic speculation when it is applied to keyboard instruments is a large number of temperaments that feature perfect fifths at the expense of the purity of the major third. The two problems facing a theorist are: (1) how to get rid of the Pythagorean Comma, and (2) how to get at least some of the major thirds closer to pure. In order to *hear* these two problems, try tuning the following, making each fifth and fourth as pure as you can (i.e., a complete absence of beats):

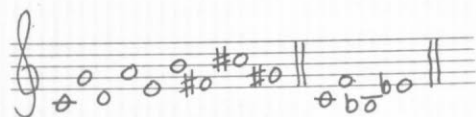


Now test the B sharp against the original C. If your tuning is accurate, B sharp will be noticeably higher than C (as a matter of fact, a quarter of a semitone higher). This is the Pythagorean Comma, which must be absorbed somewhere in the circle of fifths if we are to have pure octaves. Equal temperament distributes the Comma evenly through all twelve fifths, which accounts for the fact you flatten each fifth ever so slightly when tuning equal temperament. A true Pythagorean system places the Comma

on just one, or at most a few, of the fifths, leaving the rest pure.

While you've got that series of fifths tuned on your instrument, try playing some of the major thirds. Retune one so that it is pure, to see what a difference there is between the pure third and the Pythagorean third.

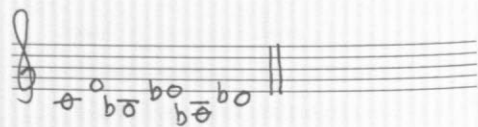
Because stringed instruments are tuned in fifths, performers on these instruments tend to play in Pythagorean intonation, so if you are ever called upon to accompany a violinist, try the following tuning . . . you will make a life-long friend! Tune by pure fifths and fourths (and, of course, don't forget the octaves):



The entire comma has been placed on one fifth: G sharp to E flat. It can, of course, be placed on *any* fifth you want, depending on the key you will be playing in.

Because of the discordant sound of the Pythagorean third, some Pythagorean tunings distribute the Comma so as to make the more commonly used thirds acceptable. Here is one such system, very easy to tune, advocated by J. P. Kirnberger in 1779:

- (1) Established the pitch of middle C with your tuning fork.
- (2) Tune C-E a pure major third.
- (3) Tune C-G and G-D pure fifths.
- (4) Tune E-B and B-F sharp pure fifths.
- (5) Tune five descending pure fifths from C. This is best done by alternating fifths and fourths, as follows:



- (6) Place A between D—below middle—C and E—above—middle—C.

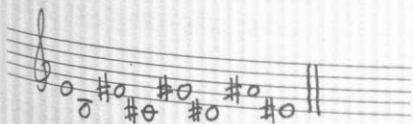
Do this by first tuning A a fifth above D, then lowering A until it is a fifth below E, and finally discovering a compromise pitch for A such that D-A and A-E are narrow by about the same amount.



The Kirnberger system is the one I always use on my clavichord, because it has only two tempered intervals, and the success of the tuning is not dependent on getting these tempered intervals absolutely right. I find tempering very difficult with the clavichord because the tone is so soft, and the beats of tempered intervals are so difficult to hear. A system like this, with one pure third and ten pure fifths is ideal.

The following system is better for harpsichord use. It is much more difficult than Kirnberger's but produces better musical results. The original directions for this system are in an eighteenth-century manuscript (given anonymously), but I have rewritten them because phrases in the original such as "tune G to C as flat as the ear will bear" and "tune A to D a very little flat" are too vague for our purposes.

- (1) Establish the pitch of middle C from your tuning fork.
- (2) Tune C-E a pure major third, and then raise E until it beats with C about three times per second.
- (3) Tune C-G a pure fifth, and then lower G until it beats with C about five times per second.
- (4) Tune D a pure fourth below G, then tune D-below-middle-C an octave below that.
- (5) Place A-below-middle-C midway between the D-below-middle-C of step (4) and the E of step (2). Both of these fifths (D-A) and A-E) should be slightly narrow, almost the same size as an equal-tempered fifth.
- (6) Tune F-below-middle-C a pure fifth down from C, and then raise F until it beats with C about three times per second.
- (7) From E, tune a series of ascending fifths (and/or descending fourths) until you reach E sharp, which should be the same pitch as F of step (6). Here is this last step in notation:



In this tuning, two-thirds of the  
November December January '68-69

Pythagorean Comma was distributed between the fifths F-C and G-D, and one third, between D-A and A-E. If you find that a system of this type sounds little different from equal temperament, you are right! Once you start distributing the Comma over more than two or three fifths, you are, for all practical purposes, approaching ET. However, you will find that there are some attractive features in this tuning not found in ET, mostly in the fact that different keys *sound* different from each other because there are so many sizes of major thirds, all the way from F-A (.02 of a semitone wider than pure) to the thirds on C sharp, F sharp, and B (all .22 of a semitone wider than pure . . . in other words, these are Pythagorean thirds.)

Dr. George Sargent  
University of Pittsburgh

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#### FROM LONDON

(Continued from page 15)

special emphasis in those factors which can help to secure a greater stability of tuning.

Phosphor bronze is used exclusively for all the stringing — the bass, from B in the bass clef, downwards having phosphor bronze coverings over phosphor bronze cores. This is done to avoid the effects of corrosion and fatigue normally associated with brass.

Their main structure is of wood. Now wood is, in many ways, quite a remarkable material. For instance, weight for weight, its strength in compression is greater than it is for most materials. However, its main disadvantage is that, being hygroscopic, it is continuously losing or absorbing water to and from the surrounding air, not only as a result of seasonal changes, but also because of daily or even hourly changes in local weather conditions — which can be quite considerable in some parts of the world. A

further problem, peculiar to our times, has been introduced by the extensive use of central heating — especially when no means of controlling humidity is provided to go with it. Nevertheless, whatever the cause of these changes, the effect on the wood is the same — it swells or shrinks according to whether it is absorbing or losing water. But, most important of all, this swelling and shrinking does not occur uniformly in all directions, and consequently gives rise to stresses in the material, which can be of sufficient magnitude as to cause serious splitting, or, at least, to upset the previously established tuning — thus causing retuning to become necessary more often than it would otherwise be.

To combat the effects of these changes and hence reduce to a minimum the amount of such retuning required, the string tensions in all Morley instruments are disposed in such a manner as to help the framework to best withstand the strain that these impose on it, and the traditional solid pine, walnut and mahogany have been replaced by fully laminated materials, glued with modern synthetic resin adhesives. In this way the framework, casework, soundboard and pin-block are made much more stable than their original counterparts.

Still on this subject of stability — while I was interviewing him, John Morley told me, "I was speaking to someone only this morning who has had one of our clavichords in Mauritius, and he said that it had performed very well there. The relative humidity at this place is very high during what I suppose is the monsoon season, but this man said that when the instrument became affected by extreme humidity he used to put it out in the sun which then cured all the effects of the damp. This struck me as being rather drastic. But obviously the instrument had not suffered any serious after-effects, and for that we are most thankful."

John Morley also makes virginals, spinets and harpsichords — but I will endeavor to tell you more of this another day.

Hugh Boyle

London, England

The Harpsichord — 17

## THE PURE EXALTED

(Continued from page 3)

Some years ago a prominent institution allowed its name to be used in connection with the publication of a book about harpsichords. The book is superb beyond question. It is thorough, well-written, interestingly written (a most important factor), and ravishingly illustrated. My objection to it is, and surely the *only* one of which I am aware, rests on what seems to me to be an obvious attempt to discredit the genuineness of the 16' choir in harpsichords. This attitude on the part of the author is dangerously close to "Pure Exalted Spirituality" because it attempts to overlook, or negate, the authenticity of the 16' choirs in many large instruments of the 'fin du siècle' period of the harpsichord. If one applies this principle to the piano, which is and has been at the apex of its own development during the past eighty years, there would result quite a different instrument than the one we are used to hearing. For example, the 'Sostenuto' (third, on grands) pedal; the 'accelerated action'; the 'capo d'astro bar'; harder and more resilient hammers, etc. would have to 'go' . . . to say nothing of triple stringing. One cannot separate the modern Concert-Grand from the 'Clementi', or Shudi & Broadwood types because all of these improvements (although not necessarily viewed as such by all concerned) have been in unbroken development. So, with the 'magnum opus' instruments of the harpsichord genre. To some of us it might be preferable to return to the 'early' pianos, but it is impossible to imagine 'L'Isle Joyeuse', or Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto being adequately performed on one of these . . . even if possible at all! Never-the-less, we now have the *same* instrument, evolved from the beginnings of Cristofori and his contemporaries. The current monsters of steel-and-glass which are rolling off Detroit's assembly-lines are no less automobiles than the 'Model T' or the 'Stanley Steamer'. The only person who would deny this is he who wishes to indulge in hair-splitting and toying with semantics. Another, and by-far

the predominating type of 'Pure Exalted Spirit' is the 'Straightfromthe-horses'mouth' type. These people always 'know' that the lute (buff-harp-whathave you) stop on *your* harpsichord is not 'really historical'. Any single one of these, would NEVER admit to a two-hundred plus year-span and would be furious at being thought of as less than 'young and talented' . . . yet they can always point out 'unhistoric' aspects of every one else's instruments while noisily leafing over the pages of music they are *unable to memorize*, when presenting what (in the circles of the floor-walker set) is 'called' a recital!

Among builders of harpsichords too, one finds 'Pure Exalted Spirits.' I know one who will not 'hinge' the propstick of the lid because it is supposed to be unhistoric to do so. Therefore the owners of these instruments must always 'make-like-with-a-walking-stick, man' because of the idiosyncratic approach on the part of the builder.

Among performers there are also 'Pure Exalted Spirits'. These are the ones who sibilantly assert that "the lute should NEVER have been used" in such-and-such a passage! Obviously their super-sensitive hearing reaches back to the original performance *by the composer!* What *doesn't* reach back, or anywhere, is their so-called musicianship which, if it were operative, would cause them to realize that any given performance is in itself its own criterion. Otherwise let's all quit performing and make recordings of 'ultimate' performances which will suffice for now and always!

In the graphic arts one also encounters 'Pure Exalted Spirits'. These are the brainy set who can always tell the 'surrounding air' (their voices are invariably pitched loud, and high, with a slightly-irritated note, or 'gurn') in the Art Museum that "that canvas would be *SO* much better if there were a mustache!" This is precisely the value of all this type of criticism, musical or graphic-art: **ONE MUSTACHE ON THE MONA LISA!**

The particular segment of the music-oriented, which literally *teems*

with 'Pure Exalted Spirits' is that of the Musicological set. Unfortunately, the *great* achievements of our *great* musicologists, (which I wish to enthusiastically endorse and witness my deepest admiration) are the privilege of the *very few*. The field, other than these few (and they are indeed, a small group) is agonizingly over burdened with charlatans. I am well-enough-aware that a great musicologist is not necessarily a performer (not to mention a *great* performer). He is in a class by himself. Lord Duveen painted no great pictures and possibly . . . no pictures *at all* . . . but he influenced the world of Art just as profoundly as if he had. My condemnation is aimed entirely at those pygmies of the musicological world, who can do nothing but complain about the performances they hear of those who can do something. They cannot play the simplest pieces on any instrument, and somehow are only monuments of assembled facts . . . *all* assembled by someone other than themselves, of course! They avidly read the 'Journal' (although secretly unable to distinguish the music of Rameau, from that of Couperin, Dandrieu and Le Roux (Gaspard) and when a prominent musicologist unearths new data on some practice of a former day, these 'Pure-but-miniscule-brained Exalted Spirits' (they can *read*, you know!) immediately 'sound off' . . . with someone else's research! I knew a man who could not attempt to play a third-grade piano-piece, who (after achieving his 'doctorate') is considered an 'authority' on Renaissance ornamentations! Now, if he is really a brain, what prevents his learning a third-grade-level piece?

Therefore let us beware! The Pure Exalted Spirits of the great pipeline *set* are abroad in the land! We must all be on guard with our notepads and sketchbooks! Don't waste the pearls that may perchance fall from their knowing lips while they rustle their un-memorized pages of music (those who *can* play) at their little 'recitals'. The inner voices speak to *them* with authority!

Hugh O'Meagher  
Peabody Conservatory



## ISOLDE AHLGRIMM

(Continued from Page 12)

**THE HARPSICHORD:** You have many harpsichord students. What seems to be their biggest problem in learning to play harpsichord?

**ISOLDE AHLGRIMM:** The same difficulties often appear. And they appear from the same group of students. Organ students have different difficulties from piano students when they switch to harpsichord. With piano students, the prime difficulty is with the touch. They usually have no feeling for the instrument itself. They want to bang and pound it. It is horrible. Some of them are more talented and change . . . others never do. Also I have discovered that piano students find it difficult to find the way back through music to the harpsichord era. Organ students have much more feeling and heart for an instrument. They have learned about the history of their instrument and even about the construction of the instrument. Also, they have already been playing Bach music before they come to the harpsichord. Also their touch is generally much better. They walk on the keys softly while piano students jump on the keys. In addition, the pianist is not used to phrasing music. They don't care about phrasing, while organists usually always do. Harpsichords can have more legato than organs.

The harpsichord also uses a method which I have found is not very often taught by most harpsichord teachers. This is called: *liaison*. A pianist once described it to me as a "finger pedal". And he is right. Of course he is speaking of a piano pedal on which he puts his foot and it sounds and sounds. The *liaison* teaches that under certain circumstances, (and you must be very careful where and how you use it) you leave your fingers on the keys even when it is not noted that way. This makes the instrument sound much richer. Of course, this would be impossible with organ playing.

The second biggest problem with students first approaching the harpsichord, and this is true for audiences

as well, is that they want to hear changes in registration. It's like a child pointing to a picture and saying "look it is blue, look it is red, look it is green". The student wants to show all the colors of the instrument right away.

I teach my students, starting with the very first lesson, that early harpsichords could not change registration rapidly. On some early instruments there was no way to make a change and on others the stops were located so far from the keyboard that it was impossible to reach these without walking around the instrument. So I teach them that when they play old music they should not make changes in the middle of the number. When contemporary harpsichord music is played, use an electronic harpsichord if you wish, but don't confuse the two. I insist that my students start out, and play for some time, on one 8' registration. And they hate it! But I teach them that they must be able to express everything with one single 8 foot registration. Later, when they have a bigger instrument and can add a 4' registration that will be a help but it is not volume which makes majesty. They usually just look at me, but later, they know why I have done all this. It's easy to make noise, then everybody is impressed. That is what so many pianists do.

And now with the electronic age, they are adding so many things to

harpsichords. I played a very modern harpsichord with which you can fortify the sound electronically. I had to play one with an ensemble and when I sat down to play, here were red lights and green lights. It looked like the control panel of an airplane. I started to play and the people I was playing with thought it was terrible so I turned it off. And then the manager came and listened for a while and then said, "I paid 20,000 Deutsch Marks for this electronic instrument and I want to hear it", so I turned it on again. But the review agreed with the rest of us that it was not producing good sound.

If the musician would only say that he would rather play two recitals to two smaller groups as I did, than to play one recital to 2,000 people it would be so much better. It is not the same thing when you take a small sounding instrument and blow it up into a big sound. If you take a small delicate painting, a miniature and photographically enlarge it to a mural, you lose the whole beauty of the painting. The entire feeling is lost. This is also true of harpsichord and clavichord music. It was not written for a big hall so if it is amplified for a big hall it loses much of its delicate charm.

**THE HARPSICHORD:** Miss Ahlgrimm, you have been most gracious to share with the readers of *THE HARPSICHORD*, some of your thoughts and philosophies about harpsichord playing.

### Society Memberships Now Open

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# LETTERS

Dear Sirs:

I have just read Mr. Zuckermann's piece about plectra in the current number of *THE HARPSICHORD* and I must disagree strongly with much of what he says.

Mr. Zuckermann says that a plectrum must "bunch up" as it passes the string, and that "A plectrum which can accomplish this process by allowing first one area of its surface, then another, to give way during the actual pluck would offer less resistance than one in which all surface areas would give way simultaneously." Rubbish.

The resistance offered by a plectrum depends very much on how stiff it is, and practically not at all on how homogeneous its material is. As the jack rises and the string pushes down on the end of the plectrum, two things happen: 1) the string is carried away from its equilibrium position, and 2) the plectrum is bent or curved downward. The contact force between the string and plectrum is approximately proportional to the distance the string is displaced, and it is this contact force which the finger feels (in addition to the weight of the jacks, and other action resistance). As the string is being displaced and the plectrum is being curved downward more and more, the slope of the end of the plectrum increases until finally the string slips off the end (moving somewhat sideways, *not* straight up-and-down). Now, the resistance offered by this process depends on how much the angle at the end of the plectrum can be changed by the application of a certain amount of force, and this is exactly what I mean by stiffness. Whether or not the material of the plectrum is organic or inorganic is quite secondary.

I further disagree with Mr. Zuckermann when he recommends "vigorous massaging or flexing of the entire plectrum" to get it to move past the string without undue force. This is absolutely the wrong thing to do, and

20 — *The Harpsichord*

Mr. Zuckermann does observe correctly that the effects do not seem to last. The reason they do not last is exactly the same reason that Delrin is such an excellent plectrum material: it can "withstand an almost limitless number of plucks without sagging."

The correct procedure for voicing with Delrin is to start with material that is managably thick (0.025-0.030") and to taper the plectrum by shaving the underside. When this is done correctly, the deflection of the plectrum is distributed quite evenly over its length, and almost any desired degree of resistance (and hence loudness) can be achieved by the skilled voicer.

Sincerely,  
John M. Reed  
Lexington, Mass.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Sirs:

The check enclosed for \$8.00 is what I believe will make for the best subscription that I have ever had. I can assure you that this magazine will not pass from my mind in my discussions with my friends. Thank you for what I think will be something great.

Sincerely,  
Keith Hill  
Byron Center, Michigan

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Mr. Haney:

I read with interest your article on adding a second set of strings to a harpsichord in the last issue of *THE HARPSICHORD*. The reason — my husband and I assembled a Zuckermann harpsichord this winter and put on the second set of strings as we went along. We worked with instructions similar to yours which involved trying to think ahead so we would not put on, what later needed to be removed. We thought this might be easier, less time consuming and neater. I guess it was. Your instructions seem to imply that it is not so difficult to do. Maybe not, but we discovered we possessed more patience than we thought we had. Now as I am just finishing voicing the second set of plectra, I am amazed that we actually did it. If you ask me whether I would go through that chaos again, unhesitant-

ly I would answer yes, the results are worth it.

Cordially,  
(Mrs.) Onita Francis  
Fall Church, Virginia

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Mr. Haney:

I called in at the Central Music Library, Westminster, the other day and now write to thank you for making a copy of "The Harpsichord" available to them. I must congratulate you on the high level of the articles in your second issue and shall look forward to seeing future issues in due course.

With every good wish for your continued success.

F. T. Miller  
Dorking, Surrey, England

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